
North Korea: Kim Jong-un's threats and the danger of a terror strategy at a time of global war

International diplomacy is on high alert, as it follows with concern the latest "moves" and statements of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Not that the world is unaware of Kim's rhetoric and threats, but at a time of global turbulence any risk factor is ominous. Italian journalist Francesco Sisci notes: "The strategy of terror is controllable in peacetime, but it can become extremely dangerous when the world is in turmoil, because it can spiral out of control." **What has caused so much concern?** On Monday 15 January, in an address to the nation, North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un announced a "decisive policy shift" in relations with South Korea. His plan to dismantle a massive monument of two young women embracing, built by his father in Pyongyang to represent Korean reunification, points in this direction. If this were to happen, it would be seen as a powerful symbolic act of total division. Indeed, Kim also announced the abolition of North Korean government agencies dealing with North-South communication and relations, and after describing South Korea as North Korea's "primary foe and invariable main enemy", he said: "We don't want war, but we have no intention of avoiding it." Kim Jong-un's speech comes as no surprise: it follows a long period of marked deterioration in relations between the two Koreas, which may have reached an all-time low today. In recent weeks, North Korea has fired artillery near a disputed maritime border with South Korea and conducted tests of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) designed to potentially reach and strike the United States. It is deploying geolocation satellites and experimenting with new miniaturised nuclear warhead technology. Finally, North Korea is responsible for the huge amount of weapons supplied to Russia in shipping containers loaded with ammunition and other military equipment. But North Korea is also the supplier of the automatic rocket launchers and rifles in the hands of Hamas. If we add to this military front "a very bellicose rhetoric", then the situation becomes serious and calls for continued vigilance. **The reasons driving the North Korean leader to escalate tensions are both internal and external.** Domestically, Kim Yong-un feels insecure and needs to regain popular consensus. In this respect, the recently disclosed crash of a passenger train in North Korea at the end of December, which reportedly killed 400 people, was a blow to the image of the entire establishment. On the foreign front, the results of the elections in Taiwan and the primaries in the United States are a cause for concern and a source of uncertainty for the North Korean leader. Meanwhile, Russia - embroiled in a conflict with Ukraine - has every advantage in diverting the world's attention to another open front. **"All these elements, combined with this new bellicose rhetoric and North Korea's proven propensity to back up its words with deeds, add to a very worrying situation,"** argues Sisci. "Promoting a strategy of tension at this time is extremely dangerous. In times of peace it can be managed. But at a time when there are two war situations, when one of these wars, the one in the Middle East, is threatening to spread, with escalating tensions in Asia, it's another matter. Adding another spark to the mix changes the whole picture and heightens the risk dramatically. The potential consequences are overwhelming. Sisci warns: "A nuclear or even just a missile attack by North Korea on the United States or South Korea or Japan would cause a situation not yet created by the other two wars, namely a global financial crisis with the collapse of the Tokyo and Seoul stock markets and a domino effect that would bring everything crashing down."

M. Chiara Biagioni